**Kingdom of God: here or future?**

We have been looking at the Kingdom of God over the past 4 weeks. What it is, what Jesus said about it and his parables about it.

There is one question that has been sitting in the background to our discussion about this Kingdom which we have not answered: Is it here already or is it coming later?

Some say it is already here and has been since Jesus’ time.

Yet others argue that the kingdom of God has been here as long as we humans have been here, and longer. But that it has been available to us through simple confidence in Jesus only from the time of his public ministry.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is hard for us to imagine that the Kingdom of God is already here when good and evil, virtue and vice, sin and holiness continue together in spite of their contrast and it is only at the end of the world when the harvest takes place.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Many people find it hard to reconcile the world they see around them with a Kingdom of God already here, so many Christians tend to focus on the kingdom to come at the expense of the kingdom now. They are waiting for the kingdom to arrive – sitting in the waiting room, waiting for the nurse to call their name. Waiting for the perfect world promised when Christ returns.

They focus on the kingdom to come.

But I believe that these poles -already and not yet - are both true and that they are held in dialectic tension between opposing truths. In our dichotomist world, we want one or the other to be true and can be uncomfortable holding two opposing equal truths in our hands.

Dialectic tension says that two opposing things can be true at the same time. It isn’t either/or — it’s both/and; and both can coexist in a tension.

“Already but Not Yet” addresses one of the most significant theological realities in Scripture: the kingdom of God and the salvation it brings are genuinely experienced now, but the final consummation remains a future hope. This tension is woven throughout biblical revelation, from the Old Testament prophecies to Jesus’s earthy ministry and the apostolic teachings.

It is my view that we can hold these two opposing concepts together: the Kingdom of God is here, and the Kingdom of God is coming.

So, let’s look at the reasoning for each of the two poles.

First, the claim that **It is here**:

It is argued that Jesus’ whole preaching and ministry was marked by this dominant reality that the kingdom is present.[[3]](#footnote-3) For Jesus, the Kingdom of heaven is not about people going to heaven. It is about the rule of heaven coming to earth.

Jesus declared that the kingdom of God was present – Luke 7:20): “*The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.”*

By exercising dominion over every phase of earthly existence [in his sermons, parables, miracles], he revealed that in fact the Kingdom of God had come.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Jesus announced the kingdom was not just a reality which would appear in the immediate future, but a reality which was already present, manifested in his own person and ministry.

Mk 1:14 *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

It was not a future kingdom with future implications, but a kingdom now, with now implications. The kingdom was not a hope, bound up with Jesus’ Parousia (his second coming), but it was something to be experienced now[[5]](#footnote-5).

Matthew 4:17 *From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

One theologian commented that if Jesus was only talking about a future kingdom, it would be impossible to explain Jesus’ words about the Kingdom of God.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The start of the new age of the Kingdom of God seems to be at the time of Christ’s baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on him,[[7]](#footnote-7) claims the NZ theologian and pastor Brian Hathaway.

Jesus declared the kingdom of God as a present reality that could be experienced by those He taught and to whom He ministered.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Jesus’ healings, particularly the casting out of demons, were proof that in Jesus’ person and works the divine sovereignty had dealt the decisive blow to the kingdom of Satan and was indubitably a wholly present reality. He identified the kingdom of God with the person of Jesus.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Luke 17:20 *Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; 21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”*

The words used imply that the coming of the Kingdom of God is so imminent that the kingdom of God may be considered as being virtually here.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Luke 11:20 and repeated in Matthew 12:28*if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

By exercising dominion over every phase of earthly existence, he revealed that in fact the Kingdom of God had come.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The theologian Walter Kaspar claims that the message of the imminent Kingdom of God is a fundamental concept of Christology. “[[12]](#footnote-12)

The NZ writer Mike Riddell wrote a wonderful book called *Godzone, a travellers guide* which suggests that the kingdom is here and now, and we are experiencing it. “You are now entering Godzone.”

Yet for all this, Jesus also implies a future kingdom as well.

In Luke *22:29 And I confer on you a kingdom [present tense], just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom [future tense] and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

At times Paul also speaks of the kingdom of God as if it were a present reality capable of being experienced by the Christian believers (Rom 14:17, 1 Cor 4:20) yet at other times he speaks of the kingdom of God as if it were a future hope, something yet to be awaited by the Christian believers (1 Thess 2:12)[[13]](#footnote-13)

In Acts, the writer Luke concentrates on the present manifestations of the Kingdom but views it as a process toward the consummation, “the restoration of all things”, at the Parousia of Christ.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The kingdom, however, had not been fully manifested in Jesus’ day—nor has it in ours. We do not yet live in a world where God’s will is a complete reality. We feel the tension of experiencing God’s kingdom in our lives and communities before it is fully realized. We still see unbelief, brokenness, and sin, telling us God’s will is not yet fully expressed.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In Matthew 24:6-8 *Jesus tells us that “You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.*

Many of the blessings of the kingdom are here to be enjoyed now; but many of them are not yet here. Some of its power is available now but not all of it. Some of the curse and misery of this old age can be overcome now by the presence of the kingdom. But some of it cannot be. The decisive battle against sin and Satan and sickness and death has been fought and won by the King in his death and resurrection, but the war is not over. Sin must be fought, Satan must be resisted, sickness must be prayed over and groaned under (Romans 8:23), and death must be endured until the second coming of the King and the consummation of the kingdom.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**The other end of the dialectic tension elastic suggests that the kingdom of God is still to come**:[[17]](#footnote-17)

The kingdom of heaven is spoken of in the future tense. One of the most notable instances of this takes place when Jesus is instructing his disciples on how to pray. Jesus prays, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). This prayer only makes sense if the kingdom has not yet fully come.

In Luke 21, Jesus prophesied about the second coming*.*

*Lk 21:27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”… Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.*

And Jesus at the Last Supper in Luke 22:*14 When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;  for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”*

The theme of the book of Revelation uses words like the Kingdom. Reign, rule, kingdom, power, glory, honour, righteousness[[18]](#footnote-18). For some the reading of the last book of the Bible speaks in future tense.

It seems that the decisive event is coming, i.e. for the release of its power in salvific blessings, still lies ahead.[[19]](#footnote-19)

But the NZ pastor, theologian and writer Brian Hathaway warns: To take the view that the Kingdom is only in the future leads to a pessimistic world view where the best thing Christians can do is man the lifeboats and save souls. [He says that] Such a view states that it is of no value whatsoever to rearrange the furniture while the ship is sinking.[[20]](#footnote-20)

It has been argued that such belief held by dispensationalists that God will institute a Kingdom of God in the future means we can trash the current world and use up all its resources without regard for shepherding what we have been given guardianship of by God.

So what do we make of this dichotomy? What stand do we take on this issue? Is it here now, or will it still be coming? Or is it both now and future?

Jewish thought (which is unlike our linear Greek thinking) could envision the final events – the judgement of evil and the arrival of the kingdom of God – as extending over a time and as a process or series of events that could involve the present.

When Jesus announced that the kingdom of God has come and is coming, that means that the last act has begun but has not yet reached its climax; the last things have come and will come.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In short, the Kingdom of God is something that straddles the dimensions of time, being present and future[[22]](#footnote-22)

The kingdom is present in its beginnings though future in its fullness: in one sense it is already here, but in the richest sense it is still to come.[[23]](#footnote-23)

It is not possible to restrict biblical teachings about the Kingdom of God/Christ to a chronological linear role.

It is true that Paul tends to speak of the ultimate revelation of the Kingdom as a future event, but there is ample evidence to support the contention that the power of this eschatological kingdom is also at work in the life of the Christian community now.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The kingdom is “already, but not yet.” Clinging to the tension here demands that we not let go of either. Some church embrace the already at the expense of the not yet and posit some over realized eschatology that leads to all kinds of excesses like the prosperity gospel. Others are so future minded that they have very little expectation for the effects of the kingdom here and now.

Again, the good news is that we don’t have to choose between already or not yet. Both are true. We should embrace the complexity. We should resist the impulse of reductionism.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Which will lead into next week’s final sermon in this series: What is our 21st century response to the Kingdom of God? What behaviours of the church and us as individuals are expected as citizens of the Kingdom of God?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zh7SD7j7Izw

1. Dallas Willard *The Divine Conspiracy* 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Erdman 121 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ridderbos, H. N. Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven. In *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 647). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Charles Colson *Kingdoms in Conflict* 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. E Stanley Jones *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* 74 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ridderbos ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Brian Hathaway *Beyond Renewal – the Kingdom of God* 93 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Goldsworthy, M. The Kingdom of God: Already but Not Yet. In *Faithlife Study Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. IVP Dictionary of the NT 646 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. IVP 648 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Colson 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Walter Kasper *Jesus the Christ* 74 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. IVP 656 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. IVP 661 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Goldsworthy [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/is-the-kingdom-present-or-future [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Hathaway 96 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hathaway 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. IVP 650 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Hathaway 98 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. IVP 647 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. IVP 656 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. J I Packer *Concise Theology* 194 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. L J Keitzer Kingdom of God II:Paul in *The Dictionary of the New Testament* 657 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. https://thereformationchurch.com/the-majesty-and-mystery-of-theological-tension/ [↑](#footnote-ref-25)